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Edward R. diGirolamo
Michael Torres
INVENTORS

Stud Spacer for Metal Wall

COATS & BENNETT, P.L.L.C.
P.O. Box 5
Raleigh, NC 27602
(919) 854-1844

STUD SPACER FOR METAL WALL

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to metal stud wall structures, and more particularly to a stud spacer adapted to be interconnected between respective studs forming a part of the wall structure.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Metal studs are commonly used to form wall structures that can be load bearing or non-load bearing. Typically such wall structures include a plurality of metal studs connected between upper and lower metal tracks. Generally, the lower track is secured to a floor structure while the upper track is generally connected to an overhead structure. Wallboards and other types of interior wall materials can be secured to the sides of the studs. Metal wall structures are designed to withstand a variety of loads. For example, there can be load bearing loads imposed on the studs of the wall structure from an overhead load. Further, wall structures may be designed to withstand non-load bearing conditions such as wind and seismic loads. In any event, these load bearing and non-load bearing forces will generally act as vertical and horizontal loads on the wall studs. These loads, in some cases, can result in damage to the studs and the finishes secured to the studs if the wall structure is not properly braced.

This problem has been addressed in the past by providing lateral structural bracing to support the studs in the weak direction. Generally, such lateral structural bracing is secured to one side of the stud wall and directly to the studs and extends diagonally across the studs. However, such bracing structures are relatively expensive and require significant labor to install.

In other cases, it is known to include spacer bars extending through openings formed in the studs. However, many spacer bar designs are difficult to install and in the end do not yield substantial strength and rigidity.

Therefore, there has been and continues to be a need for a stud spacer system that is easy to install and which provides substantial strength and rigidity to the wall structure comprising the studs and which effectively aids the studs in withstanding both load bearing and non-load bearing forces.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a stud spacer for a metal wall including a plurality of spaced apart studs with each stud including an opening therein. Respective stud spacers are interconnected between consecutive studs. In one embodiment, each stud spacer is secured to the web of an adjacent stud. Further, each stud spacer is provided with a projection or tab that extends through an opening in the adjacent stud and links to or connects to an adjacent stud spacer. Therefore, in this embodiment, the respective stud spacers are both interconnected between respective studs and linked by a linking or connecting structure that extends through openings within the studs.

In a particular embodiment, each stud spacer of the present invention is provided with a pair of opposed connecting flanges that are adapted to be secured directly to the web of two spaced apart studs. In addition, each stud spacer includes a projection or tab that extends through an opening of an adjacent stud and into an opening or slot formed in an adjacent stud spacer. The engagement of the projection of one stud spacer with the opening or slot of another stud spacer effectively links or couples the respective stud spacers together while the stud spacers are fastened or otherwise secured to the studs.

Another aspect of the present invention entails a method for forming a metal stud wall. A series of studs are positioned in spaced apart relationship and a series of stud spacers are secured within the wall with each stud spacer being disposed between two consecutive studs. Each stud spacer is fastened or secured to opposed studs. In addition, the stud spacers are linked or connected together by extending a projection or a tab from one stud spacer, through an opening in an adjacent stud, and into an opening or receiving area formed on an adjacent stud spacer. Thus, the formed metal wall includes a series of stud spacers connected between respective studs and linked or connected by a structure that extends from one stud spacer through an opening within an adjacent stud into engagement with an adjacent stud spacer.

Other objects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent and obvious from a study of the following description and the accompanying drawings, which are merely illustrative of such invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a metal wall section having the stud spacers of the present invention incorporated therein.

Figure 1A is a fragmentary perspective view showing one stud spacer extending between two studs and a second stud spacer extending away from one of the studs.

Figure 2 is a plan view of the stud spacer.

Figure 3 is a front elevational view of the stud spacer.

Figure 4 is a side elevational view of the stud spacer.

Figure 5 is an end elevational view of the stud spacer illustrating the end opposite that shown in Figure 3.

Figure 6 shows an alternate embodiment for the stud spacer of the present invention and more particularly shows an alternate design for coupling respective stud spacers together.

Figures 7A-7D are a sequence of plan views illustrating how the stud spacers of the design shown in Figure 6 are coupled together.

Figures 7E-7H are a sequence of sectional views illustrating the projection of one stud spacer being interlocked with a projection or projection receiver of another stud spacer, according to the design shown in Figure 6.

Figure 8 is a perspective view showing another alternative embodiment for the stud spacer of the present invention.

Figure 9 is a fragmentary sectional view taken through the line 9-9 of Figure 8.

Figure 10 is a fragmentary perspective view of yet another alternative embodiment for the stud spacer of the present invention.

Figure 11 is a fragmentary sectional view taken through the line 11-11 of Figure 10.

DESCRIPTION OF EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENT

With further reference to the drawings, the stud spacer of the present invention is shown therein and indicated generally by the numeral **10**. In Figure 1 there is shown a wall section indicated generally by the numeral **20**. Wall section **20** includes a series of the stud spacers **10**. Before discussing the manner in which the stud spacers **10** are incorporated into the wall section **20**, it will be beneficial to review the construction of the stud spacer itself.

Turning to Figures 1A - 5, the stud spacer **10** is shown therein and includes a central section **30**. Central section **30** extends between a pair of end flanges **34**. Forming a part of the central section **30** is a pair of longitudinal ribs **32**. Ribs **32** are

formed in the central section **30** of the stud spacer **10** by any conventional means and once formed in the central section, the ribs **32** impart strength to the central section and to the overall stud spacer **10**.

In the embodiment illustrated in Figures 1A - 5, the end flanges **34** are turned up about opposite end portions of the stud spacer **10**. More particularly in the embodiment shown, the end flanges **34** extend in a plane generally normal to the plane of the central section **30**. One of the end flanges **34** extends continuously across the stud spacer **10**. However, in this embodiment, the other end flange is divided into sections **34A** and **34B**. As shown in Figures 1A and 3, there is a space or open area that lies between the sections **34A** and **34B**.

End flanges **34** functions to secure the stud spacer **10** to a pair of spaced apart studs. Accordingly, each end flange including the sections **34A** and **34B** include an opening for receiving a fastener such as a screw. As will be discussed later, there is provided a series of screws **38** that extend through the openings in the flanges **34** and secure the stud spacer **10** to the web portion of a pair of spaced apart studs.

In addition to the end flanges **34**, the stud spacer **10** further includes a pair of side flanges **36**. In this embodiment, each side flange **36** is turned downwardly out of the plane of the central section **30**. Each side flange **36** lies in a plane that is generally normal to the plane of the central section **30**. The side flanges **36**, like the ribs **32**, strengthen the stud spacer **10**.

Each stud spacer **10** is designed such that it can be linked or connected to an adjacent stud spacer. To accommodate this function, the stud spacer **10** is provided with structure that enables the respective stud spacers to be linked or connected end to end when the stud spacers are employed within a wall section **20**. In the embodiment illustrated herein, this structure entails a projection **40** that extends from the stud spacer **10**. In the design illustrated, the projection **40** is in the form of a turned up tab that is

disposed between flange sections **34A** and **34B**. Note in Figure 1 where the projection **40** is generally centrally located on the end of stud spacer **10** and projects outwardly past the flange sections **34A** and **34B**.

About the opposite end portion of the stud spacer **10**, there is provided an opening or slot **42**. In this case, the opening or slot **42** is dimensioned or sized to receive the projection **40**. Thus, when a series of stud spacers are aligned end-to-end and incorporated into a wall section **20**, the projection **40** of one stud spacer will project through an opening in an adjacent stud and into the opening or slot **42** of an adjacent stud spacer. Thus, the projection **40**, when inserted into the opening **42**, effectively connects or at least loosely links one stud spacer to another stud spacer.

Having described the stud spacer **10**, it is appropriate now to view how the stud spacer **10** is incorporated into a metal wall section. With reference to Figure 1, the wall section **20** is a conventional metal wall section except for the stud spacers **10**. Wall section **20** would typically include tracks **22**. In this case a lower track **22** is shown. In many wall sections there would be a like upper track. In any event, metal studs **24** are connected between the tracks **22** while the tracks are in turn connected to a floor or overhead structure. Studs **24** are conventional metal studs. As such, they include a pair of opposed flanges **24A** and a web **24B** extending therebetween. An opening **24C** is provided in the web **24B** of the stud. Studs **24** can be spaced an appropriate distance apart. Extending between each pair of studs is a stud spacer **10**. The stud spacer is actually secured to each of the studs that are disposed adjacent opposite end portions of the stud spacer. In this case, the screws **38** extend through openings within the end flanges **34** and actually secure the end flanges **34** and the stud spacer **10** to the web **24B** of the adjacent studs **24**. Stud spacers **10** are connected between respective spaced apart studs **24** such that the projection **40** from each stud spacer **10** extends through an opening **24C** of an adjacent stud **24** and into the opening or slot **42** formed

about an end portion of an adjacent stud spacer. That is, the projection **40** of one stud spacer within the wall section **20** extends into an opening or slot **42** of an adjacent stud spacer.

Once secured within the wall section **20**, the stud spacers **10** provide rigidity and strength to the entire wall section. More particularly, the stud spacers **10** once incorporated into the wall section **20** discourage bowing or buckling of the studs under the influence of various loads and also tend to prevent the studs **24** from twisting under the influence of side loads or forces.

The stud spacer **10** can be constructed in various lengths and sizes. It is contemplated that the individual stud spaces would be constructed to accommodate conventional stud spacing which is generally 16 and 24 inches. The gauge of metal utilized for the stud spacer **10** can vary. However it is contemplated that the metal used would be in the range of 22 gauge to 16 gauge.

From the foregoing specification and discussion it is appreciated that the stud spacer **10** of the present invention can be easily incorporated into a conventional metal wall. By utilizing the stud spacers **10** of the present invention construction crews can quickly and efficiently erect metal walls that are strong and which will withstand substantial loads and forces from various directions.

Turning to Figures 7A-7H there is shown therein an alternative embodiment for the stud spacer of the present invention. In this embodiment, the stud spacer **10** includes a pair of projections indicated generally by the numerals **200** and **300**. That is, each stud spacer includes a projection **200** extending from one end thereof and a projection or projection receiver disposed about the other end. Therefore, it is appreciated that when the respective stud spacers **10** are coupled together, a projection **200** will project from one stud spacer and be coupled to a projection or projection receiver **300** of another stud spacer. As will be seen from the following discussion, the

structure or construction of each projection **200** or **300** is similar. Basically one projection will engage the other and the two projections will lock together. As noted above, the elements **200** and **300** are referred to as projections. However, it should be noted that in the particular embodiment illustrated herein that the projection referred to by the numeral **300** can also be simply referred to as a receiver or a projection receiver inasmuch as the same does not actually project outwardly from the main portion of the stud spacer. That is, the projection or receiver **300**, as illustrated in Figure 7A is at least partially surrounded by the structure **30** of the stud spacer.

In any event, first directing attention to projection **200**, and particularly Figures 7A-7H, the projection **200** includes a terminal end **202**. Formed on each side of the projection **200** is a side portion **204**. Formed between the side portions **204** is a flap **206**. It should be noted that the flap **206** includes a pair of opposed cut lines that at least partially separate the flap **206** from the adjacent side portions **204**. This means, of course, that the flap **206** can flex back and forth within the projection **200**. Formed about the end of flap **206** is a terminal end **206A**.

Formed in the projection **200** adjacent the flap **206** is an opening **208**. Disposed adjacent the opening **208** is a hold down element **210**. Basically as seen in Figures 7E through 7H the hold down element **210** is disposed at an angle and is supported in the projection **200**. Disposed adjacent the hold down element **210** is an opening **212**. As seen in Figure 7E opening **212** is disposed between the hold down element **210** and a downwardly directed deflector **214**. Disposed above the deflector **214** is a seat **216**.

Turning to a discussion of the other projection or receiver **300**, this structure includes the same basic structure associated with the projection **200** except that a number of the elements or components of the projection or receiver **300** is disposed in an opposite configuration with respect to the corresponding components of projection **200** to facilitate the interlocking of the structures **200** and **300**. In any event, the

projection or receiver **300** includes a terminal end **302** and a pair of side portions **304**. Disposed between the side portions **304** is a flexible flap **306** that includes a terminal end **306A**. Disposed adjacent the terminal end **306A** is an opening **308**. Disposed adjacent the opening **308** is a hold down element **310**. An opening **312** is defined between the hold down element **310** and an upward directed deflector **314** that includes a seat **316** disposed on the lower side thereof.

Now turning to Figures 7E through 7H an explanation will be set forth illustrating how projections **200** and **300** intermesh or interlock so as to lock two consecutive stud spacers **10** together. As illustrated in Figures 7A and 7E, the projections **200** and **300** are disposed in spaced apart relationship and consequently assume an unlocked mode. Note that the projections **200** and **300**, in the case of this embodiment are oriented with respect to their respective stud spacers such that the projection **200** is adapted to slide over and interlock with projection or receiver **300**. As shown in Figures 7E and 7F, projection **200** slides over projection **300**. Eventually as shown in Figure 7G, the terminal end **202** of projection **200** will engage the deflector **314** of receiver **300**. Likewise the terminal end **302** of receiver **300** will engage the deflector **214** of the projection **200**. By continuing to push the projections **200** and **300** together, the flap **206** will be directed slightly downwardly through the opening **312** in the receiver **300** while the flap **306** will be slightly deflected upwardly through the opening **212** of the projection **200**. The continuous pushing of the projections **200** and **300** together will result in the respective flaps **206** and **306** riding up or down the ramps of the deflectors **214** and **314**. Eventually the outward portion of flap **206** will come to rest or seat in the seat **316** of the receiver **300**. Likewise the outer end portion of flap **306** will come to rest in the seat **216** of the projection **200**.

The hold down elements **210** and **310** also function to engage the flaps **206** and **306** and to urge them in an interlocked or locked relationship. More particularly, the hold

down clamp **310** will engage the flap **206**, as shown in Figure 7H, and will tend to urge the terminal end **206A** of the flap **206** into a position where it engages and abuts against the terminal end **306A** of the flap **306**. This is illustrated in Figure 7H. By the same token, the hold down element **210** of projection **200** will tend to engage the flap **306** and cause its terminal end **306A** to abuts against the terminal end of **206A** of the other flap **206**. Thus, as seen in Figure 7H, the two projections are interlocked and consequently the two stud spacers associated with projections **200** and **300** are interlocked together.

With reference to Figures 8 and 9, an alternate embodiment for the stud spacer **10** of the present invention is shown therein. The embodiment of Figure 8 includes a coupling arrangement for the stud spacer **10** that differs from the embodiments discussed above. In this case, the stud spacer **10** includes opposed end portions. Formed on one end portion is a projection indicated generally by the numeral **100**. Formed on the other end portion of the stud spacer **10** is a projection receiver **102**. It will be appreciated that the projection **100** of one stud spacer is adapted to be received and coupled to a projection receiver **102** of another stud spacer.

Viewing projection **100** in more detail, the same include one or more locking members or elements. In the case of the embodiment disclosed in Figures 8 and 9, the locking elements include a series of locking tabs **104**. Note that the locking tabs **104** are spaced apart and include an upper angled surface that is configured and designed so as to be slightly deflectable or yieldable.

Turning to the projection receiver **102**, the projection receiver is formed on the opposite end of the stud spacer **10**. Projection receiver **102** includes one or more stops that are designed to engage the locking tabs **104** of a projection **100**. In the case of this embodiment, the stops are in the form of raised elements **106**. Formed underneath the raised element **106** are openings through which the projection **100** is designed to pass. More particularly, a locking or interlock relationship is realized, as indicated in Figure 9,

by inserting projection **100** underneath the raised elements **106**. As the projection **100** is moved or pressed through this area, the upper surface of the angle locking tabs **104** will engage the edges of the raised elements. In the process, the locking tabs **104** will be slightly depressed or deflected enabling them to pass under the raised elements **106**. Once the locking tabs **104** have cleared the raised elements **106**, the locking tabs will effectively return to their normal position as shown in Figure 9. Note that the locking tabs **104** in Figure 9 assume a locked position with respect to the locking elements **106**.

Turning to Figures 10 and 11, another embodiment for the locking structure for the stud spacer **10** is shown therein. In this case, the locking tabs **104** formed in the projection **100** are extended downwardly from the lower surface of the projection **100**. Further, the locking tabs **104** are angled, as illustrated in Figure 11, and are again at least slightly yieldable and flexible. The projection receiver **102** formed in the opposite end of the stud spacer **10** includes a series of openings **110** formed in the opposite end portion of the stud spacer. Disposed adjacent the openings **110** is a retainer **112**. When the projection **100** is inserted into the retainer **112**, as illustrated in Figure 11, the locking tabs **104** will snap into or enter the openings **110**. Note in Figure 10 the opening **34C** formed in the flange adjacent the projection receiver **102**. The opening **34C** tends to confine the projection **100** and the cooperation of the retainer **112** and the opening **34C** assures that the locking tabs **104** are held within the openings **110** of the projection receiver.

The present invention may, of course, be carried out in other specific ways than those herein set forth without departing from the scope and the essential characteristics of the invention. The present embodiments are therefore to be construed in all aspects as illustrative and not restrictive and all changes coming within the meaning and equivalency range of the appended claims are intended to be embraced therein.